

LEGACY OF MUSLIM CULTURE IN ISTANBUL MUSEUMS

A description of some exhibits of the museum of Islamic Objects at Istanbul, Turkey

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The Suleymaniye General Library possesses 100,000 MSS., mostly in Arabic

A visitor to Turkey will reap a marvellous harvest if he is in quest of the legacy of Islam. Even small district towns possess not only monuments of Muslim architecture, but also thousands of manuscripts in Arabic, Persian, Turkish (also Greek, Latin, Armenian), well preserved, and — what is a lesson to the self-conceited Europe and America — accessible to everybody without the least formality or difficulty.

Istanbul was for long the capital and centre of superior learning. No wonder then that it surpasses by far the other centres of cultural interest in the provinces, including the present capital, Ankara. For instance, the Suleymaniye General Library alone possesses over 100,000 manuscripts, mostly in Arabic! Museums are rich in no lesser degree. Apart from the world-famous Topkapi Saray Museum, which requires a special article to describe it, the naval museum, the military museum, the Oriental museum and others, all contain objects which concern our subject. In the present article, it is proposed to describe certain exhibits of the Museum of Islamic Objects, formerly called *Evkaf Muzesi* (the Museum of *Auqaf*, or Bequests). Before doing so, it may be permitted to us to make passing remarks on a few curiosities of Islamic interest in this city, situated both in Europe and Asia.

Some curiosities of Muslim interest in Istanbul

In the European town, near the University, there is a mosque called the Sokulu Mehmed Pasha Jami'i. On the arch leading to the staircase of its *mimbar* (pulpit), as well as on the ceiling of the dome, some pieces of the Black Stone of Mecca are pointed. Again, near the Fatih Mosque of the Sultan Muhammad the Conqueror, there is a mosque called Khirqa Sharif Jami'i. There is preserved an overcoat of the Prophet Muhammad, and in the month of Ramadhan the public is allowed to visit it. At the end of the Golden Horn, in the venerated mosque of Ayyub (a Companion of the Prophet), a piece of stone, which looks like marble, is preserved, on which there is the trace of a foot, and an inscription of the Sultan Salim says that it represents the foot-mark of the Prophet Muhammad. Near the Galata Bridge there is a mosque called the Arab Jami'i. Long before the conquest of Istanbul, it was built by Malsama Ibn 'Abd al-Malik during his attack and siege, and later preserved for the use of Muslim visitors to the town such as merchants and others. Its architecture resembles that of the old mosques in the Hijaz, and is entirely different from all the other mosques in the city built since the Turkish conquest.

The Museum of Islamic Objects

Now, coming to the Museum of Islamic Objects, it is situated behind the Suleymaniye Mosque, and contains for the most part masterpieces of calligraphy.

The Qur'an attributed to the Caliph 'Umar

The earliest document is a page of the Qur'an attributed to the Caliph 'Umar (No. 3221). The document is in a frame, and it was not possible for me to ascertain whether the writing is on both sides of the leaf. Further, the order of 'Umar never to write the Qur'an on objects of a small size is well known; this is on a very small size of about 6 in. by 4 in. I may also refer to an inscription at Medina, attributed to the same Caliph (cf. "Some Arabic Inscriptions of Medina of the Early Years of the Hijrah," in the *Islamic Culture* for October 1939, pp. 427-439). Further, I would also refer the reader to Chauvin's *Bibliographie des ouvrages arabes, etc.*, Vol. 10, "Coran". He says (p. 54), "On an autograph of 'Umar, see Sprenger in *ZDMG*, X, 811; *Ibn Batoutah*, ed. Defremery, II, 10-11; Bernauer, *Vierzig Vez.*, p. 364". On p. 57, Chauvin says, "In his *Description de l'Arabie* (Amsterdam, 1774, plates iv and v, pp. 84-85), Carsten Niehbur mentions the following fact: On plates iv and v, one may see a page copied from the Qur'an which is written on parchment and preserved as a great treasure in the collection of books made by the Academy (?) of the Jami'a al-Ashr at Cairo, since it is believed that the Caliph 'Umar himself has traced it with his own hand. Even if 'Umar is not responsible for writing it, there is no doubt that it is extremely old. There resides its interest." Chauvin adds: "Cf. Rodiger, *Abhandlungen der Akademie*, of Berlin, 1875, p. 135." Further on, p. 59, Chauvin says, "The Holbein Society's Facsimile Reprints. The Four Evangelists. Arabic and Latin. With wood-cuts designed by A. Tempesta (Rome 1590-1591), ed. by A. Aspland, Manchester-London 1873, in-4°, 135. Copy of a page in the Koran believed to be written by Caliph 'Omar."

I do not know the provenance of the document which is now in Istanbul. One has to compare the photo of what was in Cairo with what is now in Istanbul in order to decide whether they refer to the same object.

Some valuable manuscripts of the Qur'an

The pages of the Qur'an (N° 3220, 348) are said to date from the 8th century C.E. (2nd century A.H.). There is a complete Qur'an (N° 358), of a very large size, 6 ft. by 2 ft., said to date also from the 2nd century A.H. There are several copies of the Qur'an (N° 525, 507, 505), all attributed to the celebrated calligrapher Yaqut al-Musta'simi.

One of them is dated Wednesday 4th Sha'ban 693 A.H. (1293 C.E.). There is a copy of the Qur'an (N° 449) copied by 'Ali Ibn Hilal dated 401 A.H. (1010 C.E.) (N° 2015), the *Diwan* of Salamah Ibn Jandal, and N° 2014, a work of Jahiz, both by the same 'Ali Ibn Hilal. Another copy of the Qur'an (N° 431) written in 429 A.H. (1037 C.E.) by 'Ali al-Sulaihi. There are many others representing different countries and pertaining to different epochs, some of which are exhibited, and many preserved in the library of the Museum. I shall refer to only one of them.

It is well known that the Samanid ruler of Transoxiana and Khurasan, Mansur Ibn Nuh (350-366 A.H.—961-976 C.E.) had appointed a committee of 'Ulema to translate the Qur'an into Persian and also to resume in Persian the voluminous *Tafsir* (commentary) of Tabari (d. 310 A.H.—922 C.E.). There are several MSS. of this work in Turkey, Iran, Rampur, Paris, etc.; what is not so well known is that the same committee had translated their work into Turkish. The museum under description, the Library of Aya-Sophia and the Library of Millet, possess these Turkish versions, which are in two different dialects, called Eastern and Western Turkish. As Professor Zeki Velidi Togan, of the University of Istanbul, is shortly to publish an article on the subject, I abstain from going into further details.

There are objects of calligraphy in which mother-of-pearl is used. There is a Qur'an copied by Bay-Songhor (N° 294).

A very old magnetic compass for ascertaining the direction of the Qiblah

A very old magnetic compass is so constructed as to indicate the direction of the *Qiblah* from different parts of the world. It is very archaic, since on it (in Arabic script) Aghwanistan is inscribed for Afghanistan, Moghollistan for India or Hind, Khutan for China, and Tataristan Volgar for Bulghar.

There is a large number of illustrated books of the 15th, 16th and 17th centuries, both Turkish and Iranian (N° 1948, the *Khamisa* of Nizami in the hand of Mirza 'Ali; N° 1957, '*Aja'ib al-Makhlūqat*'; N° 1951, *Nuzhat al-Qulub*; N° 1954, *Chahar Maqalah*). There is a large number of book-bindings, some of which are decorated with precious stones.

The exhibits include the instruments of these works: bamboos for pens, pen-knives, etc.

There is a whole series of the firmans of the Sultans, with their monograms. Of the documents of bequests, the Waqfiyah of Khwaja Bay, dated 670 A.H. (1271 C.E.) seems to be the oldest (see N° 2198-9).

In another room, the masterpieces of the famous Turkish carpets of an old date are exhibited — big carpets, small ones for individual prayer, and those belonging to different towns (different factories). N° 678 and N° 693 are described as Seljuqide of the 13th century, and N° 720 as Seljuqide of the 14th century.

In another room there are objects of pious memory, such as a hair of the Prophet (said to be of his beard), certain objects attributed to the Imam Husayn (his turban), etc. There is a good collection of chinaware and porcelain. The woodwork is also very interesting, as also the bronze work, old lamps of mosques; a chandelier and a shell of an ostrich egg both ornamented with precious stones. Besides these, there is the crystal work, also arms, ladies' ornaments, etc.

There is also the stonework. For instance, gravestone columns dating from the 9th to 10th century (N° 2543). And I shall conclude with a curiosity. N° 2465 is a stone sepulchral monument of the 12th century, belonging to a Seljuqide. This monument has an Arabic inscription, which implies that the deceased was a Muslim; but it also has animal figures, which implies that the pre-Islamic Turkish traditions still persisted.

The only unfortunate thing in Turkey is that the museums have not enough space. They are crowded with important objects which cannot be adequately exhibited.

ISLAM IN ENGLAND

The Woking Muslim Mission and Literary Trust

Lectures

Mr. S. Muhammad Tufail, Imam of the Shah Jehan Mosque, was invited to speak to a gathering of the Caribbean Hindu Society on Saturday 20th August at Caxton Hall, London. Before the Imam started his speech Mr. 'Abul Wahab from Mauritius recited the first chapter of the Qur'an. One of the objects of the Society is to promote inter-religious and inter-social harmony, and it was for this reason that a Muslim was invited besides other Hindu speakers on the occasion of *Janam Ashtami* (a Hindu festival celebrating the Prophet Krishna's birthday).

The Imam in his speech emphasized the point that the Qur'an has made it an article of faith with Muslims to

accept all the prophets of God raised before the advent of the Prophet Muhammad and that Divine warners and messengers were sent to every nation. Only some of their names have been mentioned in the Qur'an, but a Muslim shows his general faith in all of them. Krishna was also a prophet who was sent to reform his people. To this effect the Prophet Muhammad is reported to have said, continued the Imam, *that in India there has been a prophet whose complexion was dark, his name was Kahina* (Kahina is another name for Krishna). The speaker then went on to discuss the universality of the message of Islam and its application to modern conditions. About this lecture the President of the Society expressed his thoughts in a letter to the Imam in the following way: